

## Thursday January 24th

- Wolff *For Piano (I)* (1952)  
*Bread and Roses* (1976)
- John Cage *Seven Haiku* (1951-2)
- Wolff *For Piano II* (1953)
- Tim Parkinson *piano piece* (2006)\*\*

-- INTERVAL--

- Wolff *For piano with preparations*  
(1957)
- Eric Satie *Nocturnes* (1919)
- Wolff *Piano Song* ("I am a  
dangerous woman") (1983)  
*Pianist: Pieces* (2001)\*

## Friday January 25th

- Wolff *For prepared piano* (1951)
- Eric Satie *Air; Essai; Notes (1); Notes*  
*(2); Exercices; Notes (3);*  
*Harmonies; Choral* (from

*'Carnet d'esquisses et do  
croquis', 1900-13)*

Wolff *A Piano Piece* (2006)\*  
Charles Ives *Three-Page Sonata* (1905)  
Steve Chase *Piano Dances* (2007-8)\*\*  
Wolff *Accompaniments* (1972)

--INTERVAL--

Wolff *Eight Days a Week  
Variation* (1990)  
Cornelius Cardew *Father Murphy* (1973)  
Howard Skempton *Whispers* (2000)  
Wolff *Preludes 1-11* (1980-1)

## **Saturday January 26th**

Christopher Fox *at the edge of time* (2007)\*  
Wolff *Studies* (1974-6)  
Michael Parsons *Oblique Pieces 8 and 9*  
(2007)\*\*

Wolff *Hay Una Mujer*  
*Desaparecida* (1979)

--INTERVAL--

Wolff *Suite (I)* (1954)  
*For pianist* (1959)

Webern *Variations* (1936)

Wolff *Touch* (2002)\*

(\*\* denotes world premiere; \* denotes UK premiere)

## **for pianist: the piano music of Christian Wolff**

Given the importance within Christian Wolff's compositional aesthetic of music which involves interaction between players, it is perhaps surprising that there is a significant body of works for solo instrument. In particular the piano proves to be

central to Wolff's output, from the early 1950s to the present day. These concerts include no fewer than sixteen piano solos; I have chosen not to include a number of other works for indeterminate instrumentation which are well suited to the piano (the *Tilbury* pieces for example) as well as two recent anthologies of short pieces, *A Keyboard Miscellany* and *Incidental Music*, and also *Long Piano (Peace March 11)* of which I gave the European premiere in 2007. The influence of David Tudor (as pianist and intellect) clearly shaped the character and complexity of many of the earlier works, and Wolff has been championed by a number of impressive and imaginative pianists since (among them, Frederic Rzewski, Yvar Mikhashoff, Aki Takahashi and recently Thomas Schultz).

In playing a number of Wolff's works over the past few years, it has become apparent to me that his piano music places the pianist and the instrument right at the heart of the work itself. Look at the

titles – ‘For Piano’, ‘Duo for Pianists’, ‘For Pianist’, ‘Pianist:Pieces’, ‘Touch’, ‘A Piano Piece’. The way in which, at any point, the pianist approaches both her instrument and the score (notation, notes, gestures, form, silences) significantly shapes the music’s fundamental character.

And each performance is open to change as Wolff invites the performer to engage with his utterly idiosyncratic notation to create and recreate a dynamic musical experience, unique to each context. I would argue that Wolff’s use of indeterminacy allows the performer to create the music in a way that Cage’s and Feldman’s indeterminacy limit, due to the performer entering *their* world (in the case of Feldman, a particular sound-world; for Cage, a way of realising the score). Wolff’s sympathies with improvisation allow the performer, as well as making predetermined choices, to respond to the performance moment afresh, to listen to the space and the nuances of the piano itself and to embrace

such factors into the interpretative decisions. The balance between prescriptive writing and freedom of choice is what appeals to me most of all in Wolff's music.

But what of the resulting music? I find Wolff's music generous, liberating, humble and not pretentious, direct and yet always beguiling. The recent music (*Pianist: Pieces, Touch, Long Piano (Peace March 11)* and *A Piano Piece*), none of which has been played in the UK, seems to involve a wealth of ideas, generated from over 50 years of composition but also involving new techniques, textures and forms. I love the transparency of Wolff's ideas, and the way in which he takes often very short, almost naïve motifs, and presents them as gems. At times the music triggers memories of another music – perhaps shadows of the political songs which inform much of his music, particularly in the 1970s and 80s. Webern and Cage make their presence felt at times too. But ultimately it is hard to place his

music, or relate it to much of what we know. I'm not even sure I could say it makes sense, but when projected in live performance the music is compelling and real. It is rather curiously what it is.

Bringing together Wolff's piano music in this way is both unprecedented and dangerous. None of it was written for such a context and I recognise there is the possibility of over-saturation. My aim in doing so is to invite audiences to explore and consider Wolff's music in a more focused setting than is usually possible, placing it within the context of his output as a whole, and to join with me as I have ventured into his musical world and language over the past few years. I have also included work by other composers who have been influential upon or have been influenced by Wolff's music. As with all my projects since 2001, I have commissioned three composers to write works for the occasion, and it has been a privilege to work on new pieces by Stephen Chase, Tim Parkinson and Michael Parsons.

These concerts could not have happened without the generous and optimistic support of the following organisations: Arts Council England (Yorkshire); the Hinrichsen Foundation; the Holst Foundation; the RVW Trust; and the University of Huddersfield. To these I am extremely grateful and encouraged at a time when funding for the arts can never be taken for granted.

### **Christian Wolff *For Piano (I)* (1952)**

Wolff's earliest work for (unprepared) piano, *For Piano (I)* belongs to a group of pieces composed whilst Wolff was working closely with John Cage which feature a small selection of pitches, at fixed registers, arranged in constantly changing groups.

Rhythms and dynamics are fully (and complexly) notated as are the at times lengthy silences which separate groups. Nine pitches in total are used and these are combined with a range of 13 different durations and nine different dynamics. Other works exploring the same idea use considerably less material, such as the *Serenade* (1950) which contains only three pitches. Even at this early stage, the combination of chance/control (order and superposition of events) and intuition/improvisation (arrangement within a group) which characterises much of Wolff's music is much in evidence.

### **Christian Wolff *Bread and Roses* (1976)**

In the 1970s Wolff became, as he describes, 'politicized'. That is to say, his political consciousness was awakened in such a way that he sought to reflect his (leftist) political convictions in his music in a more explicit manner than in his previous music. Arguably his open scores of the previous decade were implicitly highly political in

their very open-ness, allowing considerable performer freedom and creating social contexts within which music may be forged through dialogue (verbally and in sound through performance).

*Bread and Roses* was the first of many works in which Wolff expressed himself as a composer by taking as source material a song associated with the workers' movement. A fragment of the tune is heard near the beginning, but is mostly subjected to a sequence of variations. Matters of dynamics, pacing and tempo, articulation (of sound and silence) are left to the pianist to decide upon.

'Bread and Roses' was a poem written by James Oppenheim in 1912 and subsequently set to music by Caroline Kohlsaas. It takes as its inspiration the successful and famous mill strike of the same year in Lawrence, Massachusetts, in which 20,000 workers, many of whom were women, struck tirelessly against cuts in pay. During the strike (which lasted 10 weeks before the workers won their fight safeguarding the wages of over 250,000

workers across New Hampshire) many of the women held placards which read "We want bread and roses too".

As we come marching, marching in the beauty of the day,  
A million darkened kitchens, a thousand mill lofts gray,  
Are touched with all the radiance that a sudden sun discloses,  
For the people hear us singing: "Bread and roses! Bread and  
roses!"

As we come marching, marching, we battle too for men,  
For they are women's children, and we mother them again.  
Our lives shall not be sweated from birth until life closes;  
Hearts starve as well as bodies; give us bread, but give us roses!

As we come marching, marching, unnumbered women dead  
Go crying through our singing their ancient cry for bread.  
Small art and love and beauty their drudging spirits knew.  
Yes, it is bread we fight for -- but we fight for roses, too!

As we come marching, marching, we bring the greater days.  
The rising of the women means the rising of the race.  
No more the drudge and idler -- ten that toil where one reposes,  
But a sharing of life's glories: Bread and roses! Bread and roses!

(taken from Edith Fowke and Joe Glazer, *Songs of Work and Protest*)

## **John Cage *Seven Haiku* (1951-2)**

These beautifully restrained miniatures are closely related to Cage's famous piano work, the *Music of Changes* (1951), the first work in which he was to use chance processes methodically to determine nearly every detail of the score. The *Seven Haiku* use related material but in shorter phrases and restricted densities. Each piece lasts only three bars, which are spaced across the page consistently, spanning only the lower portion of each page. However, tempi are different for each so though they cover the same amount of notation space, they are not consistent with regard to duration. They were composed around the same time that Wolff was 'studying' with Cage and the use of silence and noise, as well as the focus resulting from the brevity of each piece, are all characteristics of Wolff's musical language.

## **Christian Wolff *For Piano II* (1953)**

*For Piano (II)* follows similar methods to *For Piano (I)*, the main difference being that, in response to Pierre Boulez's criticism that he used too few notes, the pitch material consists of all 88 notes of the piano keyboard. One further difference is that far fewer dynamics are notated and there are no tempo indications, leaving much more up to the performer to decide. The rhythmic complexity was no doubt inspired by David Tudor's readings of Boulez's Second Piano Sonata and Cage's *Music of Changes*.

## **Tim Parkinson *piano piece* (2007)**

Starting from nothing except just the idea of the sounds from the instrument, and the possibility of anything.

From this starting point, then tracing a path through this limitless field of constant possibility.

Focussing on the present.

Every moment in the piece as a beginning.

(TP)

**Christian Wolff** *For piano with preparations*  
**(1957)**

This is the third work in which Wolff continues Cage's legacy of music written for the prepared piano, here inserting screws, nuts, bolts, rubber, wood and a coin between the strings of a piano.

Wolff also asks for the pianist to pluck, mute, strike, snap the strings and utilise other means of modifying the timbre. It is a fully notated work and as such brings to a close the first period of his compositional style, before ushering in the indeterminate works for which he is more known

(such as the *Duo for Pianists I and II*, which feature a unique kind of coded notation to be realised by the performer both in advance and in the performance moment). *For Piano with Preparations* is very much about the piano, forsaking more traditional aspects of pianism for a notational complexity which invites the pianist and listener to focus attention on the immediacy of each sound and take delight in the resulting nuances of colour and timbre.

### **Eric Satie *Nocturnes* (1919)**

The five *Nocturnes* are amongst Satie's last works, contemporaneous with the masterpiece *Socrate*.

Unlike many of the piano works, they are in a more serious vein, with none of the surreal and witty comments which decorate scores such as the *Gnossiennes* and *Sonatine bureaucratique*.

Harmonically they each follow a set of rules which govern the possible note combinations. These allow for a varying subtle blend of tonal and more

chromatic shades, with the fifth nocturne the most chromatic (pointing toward subsequent, uncompleted nocturnes to add to this set). The restrained simplicity of these pieces mark them out as distinct from nocturnes of the nineteenth century, though textural characteristics of works by Field and Chopin are, as it were, distilled to suit Satie's more objective musical language. However, in comparison to many other piano works by Satie these beautiful pieces are beguilingly complex in their melodic and harmonic direction.

Like other experimental composers, Satie has proven to be a key influence upon Wolff and his musical language, and he has commented that the *Nocturnes* are particular favourites.

### **Christian Wolff *Piano Song* ("I am a dangerous woman") (1983)**

I am a dangerous woman  
Carrying neither bombs nor babies  
Flowers or molotov cocktail

I confound all your reason, theory, realism  
Because I will neither lie in your ditches  
Nor dig your ditches for you  
Nor join your armed struggle  
For bigger and better ditches.  
I will not walk with you nor walk for you,  
I won't live with you  
And I won't die for you  
But neither will I try to deny you  
Your right to live and die.  
I will not share one square foot of this earth with you  
While you're hell-bent on destruction  
But neither will I deny that we are of the same earth,  
Born of the same  
Mother I will not permit  
You to bind my life to yours  
But I will tell you that our lives  
Are bound together  
And I will demand  
That you live as though you understand  
This one salient fact.  
  
I am a dangerous woman  
because I will tell you, sir,

whether you are concerned or not,  
Masculinity has made of this world a living hell  
A furnace burning away at hope, love, faith, and justice,  
A furnace of My Lais, Hiroshimas, Dachaus.  
A furnace which burns the babies  
You tell us we must make  
Masculinity made Femininity  
Made the eyes of our women go dark and cold,  
sent our sons - yes sir, our sons -  
To War  
Made our children go hungry  
Made our mothers whores  
Made our bombs, our bullets, our  
'Food for Peace',  
our definitive solutions and first strike policies  
Yes sir  
Masculinity broke women and men on its knee  
Took away our futures  
Made our hopes, fears, thoughts and good instincts  
'irrelevant to the larger struggle'.  
And made human survival beyond the year 2000.  
An open question.  
Yes sir  
And it has possessed you.

I am a dangerous woman  
because I will say all this  
lying neither to you nor with  
Neither trusting nor despising you.  
I am dangerous because  
I won't give up, shut up, or put up with your version of  
reality  
You have conspired to sell my life quite cheaply  
And I am especially dangerous  
Because I will never forgive nor forget  
Or ever conspire  
To sell yours in return.

**Joan Cavanagh** This poem appears in *My Country is the Whole World* (Women's Peace Collective, Pandora Press 1984)

### **Christian Wolff *Pianist: Pieces* (2001)**

Over the last 15 years or so, Wolff has composed works which continue to explore notational possibilities and indeterminacy. His music has become increasingly difficult to categorise and seems to include very different techniques, gestures, forms and notations all within a single piece.

*Pianist:Pieces* is such a work. Written in five sections, all of which are curiously typical of Wolff, fragmented lines (sections 1 and 4) contrast with sustained lyricism (section 2) and chordal movement (sections 3 and 5). It also includes examples of a recent notation Wolff has used in his piano writing (found also in *Touch* and *Long Piano (Peace March 11)*) which notates which fingers the pianist is to play for any given event, and with what duration/rhythm, but does not notate which pitch to play, a way of dealing with the frustration of working with the same 88 notes over and over again.

*Pianist:Pieces* was written for Aki Takahashi in memory of Iannis Xenakis.

### **Christian Wolff *For prepared piano* (1951)**

This is the earliest work by Wolff featured in these concerts. It clearly reveals the influence of John Cage, particularly his music from 1948-50, such as *The Seasons* and *String Quartet in Four Parts*,

through its use of repeated and fixed sonorities. And of course it is a work for prepared piano, an instrument devised and made famous by Cage. However it also demonstrates a tendency toward discontinuity, true of Wolff's music right up to the present day. It was composed in a normal linear fashion before the sequence of events was thrown into disarray by re-writing it so that the vertical succession of events became the horizontal succession and vice versa.

**Eric Satie *Air; Essai; Notes (1); Notes (2); Exercices; Notes (3); Harmonies; Choral (from 'Carnet d'esquisses et do croquis', 1900-13)***

"I've been noticing my music now as a kind of...If it's related to the sound of some other music probably most to a rather odd combination, of Satie and Ives" (Wolff, 1975)

These miniatures by Satie seem to complement Wolff's music perfectly, through their brevity,

textures and titles. Somehow, they sound utterly contemporary.

### **Christian Wolff** *A Piano Piece* (2006)

The most recent of Wolff's works for piano.

("Haven't we decided to let [expressivity] follow rather than lead us?", Wolff, 1964)

### **Charles Ives** *Three-Page Sonata* (1905)

Ives' *Three-Page Sonata*, so called because it filled (in Ives' tiny handwriting) a mere three pages of manuscript, is an astonishingly bold and innovative work, written in 1905. On one of the original printed scores Ives wrote "made mostly as a joke to knock the mollycoddles out of their boxes and to kick out the softy ears!". Certainly much of the work is uncompromising in its bold harmonies, inventive cross-rhythms, and, in the last movement, sheer noise. However the calm and serene middle movement, with its bell-like upper melody, creates a beautiful contrast with the outer movements. The

first movement is the most sonata-like and features an opening theme, and a number of similar references throughout, based upon the B.A.C.H. motif. The final movement is typical Ives, combining a deranged march with a ragtime melody in two beats per bar with an accompaniment in three. Wolff parodies the first movement in his recent piano work *Long Piano (Peace March 11)*.

### **Stephen Chase *Piano Dances* (2007-8)**

Kinds of movement, from quite lively to seemingly immobile [angle-temperature-distance-light-weather] – the idea of dance more so than familiar dance forms as such (though there are those too). There are three dances: *nach yet brasilien dance*, *polares tanz*, and *Geometry Dance (after Helen Chadwick)*.

*"att kunna arbeta i kyla är  
en fråga om koncentration AS IT DRIVES US  
ON!, jag tycker inte att det är  
svårt AS WE DRIVE IT!, jag studerar  
förresten ESKIMÅERNA nu, och de har*

*det förmodligen ännu kallare DRIVEN,  
AS DOWN-SOOT RISING TO THE CEILING,  
säger thomas kling, dusseldorfbo som  
gästar vasa"*

From *polares piktogramm* by Thomas Kling, trans. Andrew Duncan

["to be able to work in the cold is a question of concentration (...) I don't think it's difficult (...) I am, besides, studying the Eskimos now, and they probably have it even colder, says Thomas Kling, a Dusseldorfer who is visiting Vasa."]

## **Christian Wolff *Accompaniments* (1972)**

This is the first work in which Wolff attempted to reflect his political convictions through his musical composition. Cornelius Cardew and Frederick Rzewski, both of whom knew and had worked with Wolff, were also starting to write music at this time which sought to marry their left-wing ideologies with their musical output, in arguably more radical ways, in what is sometimes compared to a nineteenth century romantic idiom. Wolff's response, however, was to use text as the primary

means of communication, choosing to preserve an essentially abstract musical language with little reference to other musical genres.

The chosen text is drawn from 'China: the revolution continued', by Jan Myrdal and Gun Kessle, and uses the words of two workers, a veterinarian and a midwife, recounting their experiences in the villages during the cultural revolution. They relate their methods and activities to Maoist ideology, noting how their work in its ordinary detail amounts to political acts. What particularly stands out is the honesty and integrity of these two individuals in their desire change. In many ways they reflect the approach of Christian Wolff, composer, who refuses to position his work in anything other than a political context through the decisions he chooses to make and not to make in terms of notation, performer relationships, and titles.

However, there is of course a problem with this text given what we now know of Mao's murderous

regime. Wolff composed the work at a time when numerous left-wing artists and intellectuals held Mao in some esteem as the instigator of a utopian socialist reality, and the heroic symbol of the unification of a nation. Quite incredibly, the view of Mao as ruthless dictator, who would stop at nothing to quash those who would speak out against his methods and against the communist party, had not yet reached the West, and in 1972 (just four years before Mao's death) Wolff, Cardew and even Cage had isolated Mao as a leader who was also a great revolutionary thinker and one who heralded a bright future.

So why play *Accompaniments* today?

These concerts are intended as a survey of Christian Wolff's music. As such they communicate something about Wolff the person behind the notes, his priorities, his convictions, as well as his techniques, soundworld, etc. I have chosen to include

*Accompaniments* as I believe it speaks something of the integrity and boldness of Wolff's approach to his art. If the text was a direct homage to Mao I would choose not to play it. It is not. Instead we hear about ordinary people doing their work, doing the best they can.

*Accompaniments* was written for the composer/pianist Frederick Rzewski and is in four parts. The first part sets the text, with the pianist speaking/singing phrases of her choice, accompanied by constantly reconfigured chords against each syllable. Parts two and three invite the pianist to play percussion whilst selecting accompanying material to be played at the keyboard, and the fourth part features keyboard alone in a free-flowing counterpoint.

**Christian Wolff *Eight Days a Week*  
*Variation*(1990)**

A popular tune from a very different source than is usual for Wolff – The Beatles – forms the basis for a series of variations. The piece is one of a number of Beatles-inspired compositions the pianist Aki Takahashi commissioned from a number of composers around this time.

### **Cornelius Cardew *Father Murphy* (1973)**

In contrast to Wolff's fragmented and complex variations on politically-oriented tunes, Cardew chose a more directly accessible approach to the material. *Father Murphy* is a simple and affecting arrangement of the traditional Irish ballad which relates the uprising of 1798 in County Wexford against the English government, led by the priest Murphy, who became a casualty of the English army's betrayal.

At around this time, Cardew took the radical step of denouncing his and his colleagues' previous experimental music and devoted himself to writing music which would be of direct use to active

political engagement. Whilst many remain baffled by this decision, not to say disappointed that the composer himself rejected many very fine works, I cannot but be drawn to the utterly sympathetic arrangements and compositions which occupied him through the 1970s. Cardew's fervent commitment to political causes through rallies, concerts and other events, as well as through his music, can only be seen as a selfless act of the greatest integrity.

### **Howard Skempton *Whispers* (2000)**

Along with Cornelius Cardew and Michael Parsons, Skempton was a co-founder of the infamous 'Scratch Orchestra', an open group of people of varied and no musical experience dedicated to creating a situation in which a new music might flourish. Wolff composed one of his best known works, *Burdocks*, partly with this group in mind. Since that time Skempton has devoted his energies to composing mainly miniatures (though in recent

years his compositions have become rather more evolved), many of which are for solo piano.

*Whispers*, like many of his works, bears the influence of composers such as Morton Feldman, John Cage and Eric Satie.

### **Christian Wolff *Preludes 1-11* (1980-1)**

These eleven pieces are entirely abstract explorations of the musical techniques and language Wolff had been developing through the 1970s. Yet Wolff also bases much of his material on politically-oriented songs, particularly songs that stem from travellers reflecting life on the road, such as 'Hallelujah, I'm a Bum', 'Abi Yoyo' (made known by the famous American folk singer Pete Seeger), 'Po Lazarus' and 'Acres of Clams'.

Wolff writes that as well as being typical preludes in the traditional manner (each exploring a particular idea) "the title also suggests orientation towards some kind of future, open to something that might come next."

## **Christopher Fox *at the edge of time* (2007)**

Music is, above all, an art in time, and time is both something we can measure against a pulse – a clock, a heart-beat, felt striking metal – as well as being a space in which things may happen. *at the edge of time* is music in which a musician or musicians, and the sounds they make, occupy a space in time, marking it, giving us a sense of how it is passing.

*at the edge of time* is part of a larger work-in-progress, *hearing not thinking*, which will eventually consist of separate parts for accordion, bass drum, guitar, prepared piano, trombone, guitar, any bowed string instrument and any woodwind instrument, any number of which may be played in the same space at the same time. The first four parts, for bass drum, guitar, prepared piano, bowed string instrument and woodwind instrument were written in the winter of 2006-7 to a commission from the

Bregenzer Festspiele for ensemble Intégrales and premiered by ensemble Intégrales in Bregenz on August 4<sup>th</sup>, 2007. Tonight's performance is the UK premiere of the work. It plays for about 15 minutes.

(CF)

### **Christian Wolff *Studies* (1974-6)**

These three studies, though written with keyboard in mind, may be arranged for any instrumentation, in common with a number of Wolff's works from this period. Essentially they are exercises in rhythm which, in their transparency, relate most clearly to the music of Webern.

### **Michael Parsons *Oblique Pieces 8 and 9* (2007)**

These are the two most recent in a continuing series of 'Oblique Pieces', begun in 1996. The title refers to the compositional process, which uses a permutational method to determine indirectly how the 12 pitches of the chromatic range are combined and distributed. The results of this method are

unpredictable, influencing the progress of the music at one remove, sometimes giving rise to fleeting tonal implications which remain generally unresolved. Rhythmic organisation is relatively free and independent.

In No.8, abrupt toccata-like motifs predominate. These are interrupted by the occurrence of sustained sounds which act as pauses for reflection, during which the material is, as it were, surveyed from a distance.

In No,9 the influence of Christian Wolff may be revealed in the more episodic and discontinuous character of the music, in which florid rubato passages, short melodic fragments and chromatically accumulating chordal sequences are juxtaposed.

Oblique Pieces 8 & 9 are intended to be performed as a linked and contrasting pair. They were written in 2007 and are dedicated to Philip Thomas.

(MP)

## **Christian Wolff *Hay Una Mujer Desaparecida* (1979)**

The title is that of a song by activist and singer Holly Near, “a lament, commemoration and protest for the women who “disappeared,” imprisoned and killed by the junta in Chile during the seventies. The music is a reflection on the song.” (Wolff).

## **Christian Wolff *Suite (I)* (1954)**

In three movements (with the second and third featuring the prepared piano), the *Suite* most obviously bears the influence of Cage’s piano writing of the 1950s, as well as the early piano works by Stockhausen. Individual sounds and collections of sounds are the focus here. Like all of Wolff’s piano music from the 1950s, these pieces would not exist if it were not for the virtuosity of technique and intellect of pianist David Tudor.

## **Christian Wolff *For pianist* (1959)**

Toward the end of the 1950s, Wolff developed a style of notation which could be described as a

form of shorthand, a kind of code which, though at times mystifying, was designed to offer choice, within fixed parameters, to the performers as to sounds and pitches, durations, etc. At the same time he began to develop a music which was dependent upon the performers' responses to each other, involving cues of various kinds which determined when or how or what each performer was to play next. (Subsequently, performer interaction became one of the main characteristics of his music through the 1960s and 1970 and has remained an important part of his technique and aesthetic since.)

Naturally, when writing for a solo instrument this aspect of his writing was not possible. However, in one piece, *For Pianist*, Wolff explored how the actions a performer makes during the performance itself might determine what material should be played next. The work is notated using his code, making it indeterminate in terms of sounds produced. Pages may be played in any order, repeated or not played at all. Additionally, Wolff

sets up systems whereby a task is set (such as play a sound as softly as possible) which is followed by a choice of tasks dependent upon the result of the previous task (such as if no sound was heard, or the sound was louder than desired, or the sound was indeed as soft as possible). The pianist must instantly react to this sound and move to the appropriate material.

For this performance, I have used chance to determine the number and order of pages. I have quasi-notated some of the coded material whilst others I have left more free to respond to the performing moment. But there are many choices (changing of page order, durations of pages, etc.) that will be dependent upon what happens during the performance itself.

## **Anton Webern *Variations* (1936)**

Webern of all the serialists is the most lucid in his formal outworking of serialist principles and this work reflects Webern's concern in his late works for clarity and transparency, concerns which are clearly evident in Wolff's music. Indeed, the first assignment Cage gave Wolff as a young student (there were only four!) was to analyse the first movement of Webern's symphony. Despite the apparent 'coolness' of the late works, the *Variations* also reflect the warmth and tenderness of much of the earlier works and the rhythmic gestures and phrasing can be seen to be a continuation of the romantic tradition. The use of sevenths and ninths intervals don't simply point towards the pitch characteristics of the next generation of musical modernists, they also create, as pianist John Tilbury has noted, a tender, 'bluesy' feel, a quality which appealed to the American experimentalists who, though rejecting the system which produced the notes, perceived a warmth and beauty in the sound.

## **Christian Wolff *Touch* (2002)**

*Touch* was made for [pianist] Thomas Schultz. While working on it I learned of Earle Brown's death, so the music also became a memorial for him.

The title translates "toccata", a type of piece (or a title) that goes back to late 16<sup>th</sup> century Italy, involving some virtuosity and improvisatory elements.

There are 5 sections and a coda (the latter had appeared as an independent piece in "Keyboard Miscellany"). The fifth section has 5 subsections. The various parts I imagine as making up patches of an evolving quilt.

There are some open elements, especially in the details of playing, but also structural (an idea I found long ago in Frescobaldi's [1583-1684] preface to some keyboard works, including "toccatas". These works are referred to as 'in open score'.)

(CW)

*Touch* seems an appropriate work to end this series of concerts, not only because it is one of Wolff's most recent works, but also because it brings together a number of the techniques revealed over his music of the past 55 years. Indeterminacy is a feature throughout – in the absence of dynamics, tempi (much of the time), and articulation, but also in extended passages for which the pianist needs to make a realisation (choice of clefs, pitches, etc.). It is both a virtuosic work and yet entirely transparent in its texture (and consequently *more* virtuosic!). It is fragmentary at times, discontinuous, quirky, but also lyrical, tender, and often very beautiful.

*"I take responsibility for the competence of a score and hope to have made something hazardous with which we may try ourselves"* (Christian Wolff, 1964)

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**Philip Thomas** (b.1972, North Devon) specialises in performing new and experimental music, including both

notated and improvised music. He places much emphasis on each concert being a unique event, designing imaginative programmes that provoke and suggest connections. Philip's most recent solo projects have included concerts of music composed by improvisers, including premieres of new works by Mick Beck, Chris Burn and Simon H.Fell; premiere performances of major new works by Richard Emsley and Christopher Fox; a three-concert festival of the music of Morton Feldman, alongside three specially commissioned new works by British composers (this took place in October 2002 at the Mappin Art Gallery, Sheffield, and subsequently toured venues across the country); performances of solo music by Lachenmann, Zimmermann and others in Spring 2002; and a John Cage and contemporary British composers festival in February 2001, including a number of world and British premieres.

Future plans include performances of Alvin Curran's *Inner Cities* and newly commissioned works by Laurence Crane and Markus Trunk.

Philip's debut solo CD 'Comprovisation' was released in 2007 on the Bruce's Fingers label (BF66). Based upon his recent series of concerts featuring music exploring

improvisation and notation, it features music by Mick Beck, Chris Burn, John Cage, Simon H Fell, Michael Finnissy and Paul Obermayer.

Philip is a regular pianist with leading experimental music group *Apartment House*. Recent performances with them have included a Mazulis/Macuinas double portrait concert at *hcmf 2007*; an appearance at the *Høvikodden Festival*, Oslo, Norway; a James Clarke portrait concert at Kettle's Yard; Christian Wolff portrait concerts with the composer and others (Conway Hall, London; Kettles Yard, Cambridge); and a 70<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration of Christian Wolff's music with the composer at Kettles Yard, Cambridge. He has broadcast with *Apartment House* on the BBC and WDR.

Since 2005 Philip has worked with the renowned pianist Ian Pace in programmes of experimental music for two pianos, including music by Cage, Brown, Wolff, Feldman, and Fox. In 2006 he formed a piano and electronics duo with composer James Saunders which performed at the 2007 Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival and was subsequently broadcast on BBC Radio 3. He has also participated in improvisation concerts with local musicians in Sheffield.

Philip was awarded a PhD from Sheffield University in the performance practice of contemporary piano music. Between 2000 and 2005, he was Head of the Sheffield Music School whilst pursuing an active performing and teaching career. He is currently a Senior Lecturer in Performance at the University of Huddersfield.

**Stephen Chase** (b. London, 1973) studied composition with George Nicholson at the University of Sheffield, where he recently completed a PhD in musicology. His music has received commissions and performances from the Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival, Apartment House, BBC Singers, Spitalfields Festival, Sound Intermedia, members of CoMA (Contemporary Music-making for Amateurs) and the London Sinfonietta, pianist Philip Thomas, and students of the Sheffield Music School. He has had pieces shortlisted by the SPMN (Society for the Promotion of New Music) and participated in a number of projects under their auspices (music theatre, live electronics, community music training). He enjoys working with a variety of means but is increasingly interested in combining an attention to formal process (the perceptual tension between the

evolving temporal dynamic of concert music and the spatial narratives common to installation and visual arts) with collaborative modes of working, to create performance situations that can range from lively instability to near static timbral change.

As an improvising musician he has performed solo and in a variety of regular and ad hoc ensembles in Sheffield, London and Northampton with musicians and dancers including Lol Coxhill, Damo Suzuki, and Earle Brown.

**Christopher Fox** is a composer. He was born in York in 1955, grew up in the north of England and now lives in London. He studied composition with Hugh Wood, Jonathan Harvey and Richard Orton at Liverpool, Southampton and York Universities and was awarded the degree of DPhil in composition from York University in 1984. In 1981 he won the composition prize of the Performing Right Society of Great Britain; since then he has established a reputation as one of the most individual composers of his generation. Between 1984 and 1994 he was a member of the composition staff of the Darmstadt New Music Summer School. During 1987 he lived in West Berlin as a guest of the DAAD Berlin Artists Programme. In 1994 he joined the Music Department at the University

of Huddersfield, eventually becoming Professor in Composition. Since April 2006 he has been Research Professor in Music at Brunel University.

Fox's work has been performed and broadcast world-wide and has featured in many of the leading new music festivals, from the Amsterdam PROMS to the BBC Promenade Concerts and from St Petersburg to Sidney. In recent years he has established particularly close relationships with the Ives Ensemble in the Netherlands, for whom he wrote the evening-long ensemble installation, *Everything You Need To Know* (2000-1) and with Apartment House in the UK. Fox's music is widely available on CD, with a portrait CD on NMC, four portrait CDs on Metier and other recordings on Artifact, BVHaast and FMR.

Fox has been hailed by Andy Hamilton in *The Wire* as "a tantalising figure in British Music"; Paul Driver in the *Sunday Times* has described his music as "impressive, thoughtful, entertaining and extremely varied". Fox's work regularly extends beyond the conventional boundaries of the concert hall and includes the radio piece *Three Constructions after Kurt Schwitters*, commissioned by the BBC in 1993 and nominated for the Prix Italia, gallery works in collaboration with video artists and printmakers,

and a number of extended ensemble works which defy categorisation. Paul Griffiths, writing in the Times, has said of Fox's work that "he takes simple ideas but he makes them sound quite wonderful".

**Tim Parkinson** (b.1973, England) studied at Worcester College, Oxford followed by private study with Kevin Volans in Dublin. Since 1997 he has been based in London as a freelance composer, curating, presenting and performing concerts, forming working relationships with musicians without intention of forming an ensemble. He is an occasional performer with Apartment House, Plus Minus, and in Parkinson Saunders, a lo-fi electronics duo with composer James Saunders.

In 2001 he attended the Ostrava New Music Days in the Czech Republic, attended seminars with Jean-Yves Bosseur, Petr Kotik, Alvin Lucier, Zsolt Nagy and Christian Wolff.

In summer 2005, with composers John Lely and Markus Trunk, he launched the series Music We'd Like to Hear, with a second series in 2006, and a third planned for July 2007.

He has written music for various ensembles including Apartment House, Reservoir, The London Sinfonietta,

[rout], Chroma, and Duo Contour, and also written for various soloists including Steve Altoft, Rhodri Davies, Julia Eckhardt, Brian Lee, Anton Lukoszevieze, Annie Parker, Andrew Sparling, Craig Shepard, Stefan Thut. His music has been performed in UK, Europe, USA, and recently in Armenia and New Zealand.

He has also written music for installation projects including; sixty eight sounds for Welborne for the Welborne Arts Festival 2005; "untitled installation (for Sound 323)" in collaboration with Angharad Davies, for Sound323, Archway Road, London; "ten brass" for St. George's Gardens, Bloomsbury, London, June 2001.

**Michael Parsons** has been active as a composer, performer, writer and teacher since the mid-1960s. In 1969 he was co-founder with Cornelius Cardew and Howard Skempton of the *Scratch Orchestra*, a large experimental group of trained and untrained musicians, including composers and improvisers, as well as visual, mixed-media and performance artists, who pioneered an open approach to musical activity and performance unrestricted by traditional boundaries. In 1972 he toured as a percussionist with Steve Reich and Musicians in the first European performances of Reich's Drumming. In 1974

he formed a duo with Howard Skempton to perform their own works for percussion, voices and instruments. He continued to work closely with visual artists, and from 1970-1990 was a visiting lecturer in the Department of Fine Art, Portsmouth Polytechnic, at Chelsea College of Art and the Slade School of Art, University College London. In 1996-7 he was composer-in-residence at Kettle's Yard, Cambridge. Recent performances and commissions include have taken place in Germany, Austria, the U.S.A. and Italy. His writing on music has appeared in the *Musical Times*, *Contact* and other journals and he is a contributor to the *New Grove Dictionary of Music*.

**Christian Wolff** was born in 1934 in Nice, France. He's lived mostly in the U.S. since 1941. He studied piano with Grete Sultan and composition, briefly, with John Cage. Though mostly self-taught as a composer, the work of John Cage, Morton Feldman, David Tudor and Earle Brown have been important to him, as well as long associations with Cornelius Cardew and Frederic Rzewski. A particular feature of his music is the various freedoms it allows performers at the time of performance as well as the variable results possible for any one particular piece,

for which various new notations have been invented. Underlying notions in the work are shared freedom, self-determination and democratically-spirited collaboration. The music is published by C.F. Peters, New York and much of it is recorded, on many labels. A number of pieces, starting in 1953, have been used and commissioned by Merce Cunningham and his dance company. Wolff has been active as a performer and as improviser - with Takehisa Kosugi, Steve Lacey, Christian Marclay, Keith Rowe, William Winant, the group AMM, Kui Dong and Larry Polansky. His writings on music (up to 1998) are collected in "Cues: Writings and Conversations", published by MusikTexte, Cologne. He has received awards and grants from the American Academy and National Institute of Arts and Letters, the Ford Foundation, DAAD Berlin, the Asian Cultural Council, the Fromm Foundation, the Foundation for Contemporary Performance Arts (the John Cage Award for music) and the Mellon Foundation. He is a member of the Akademie der Kuenste in Berlin and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. In 2004 he received an honorary Doctor of Arts degree from the California Institute of the Arts. Academically trained as a classicist, Wolff was professor of

classics and music at Dartmouth College from 1971 to 1999.